

By: Martinez Fischer

H.R. No. 154

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, The State of Texas lost a trailblazing champion of  
2 education and civil rights with the passing of former state senator  
3 Joe J. Bernal of San Antonio on January 25, 2025, at the age of 97;  
4 and

5           WHEREAS, Born in San Antonio on March 1, 1927, Joe Bernal was  
6 the son of Jose and Antonia Bernal; he grew up with eight siblings  
7 on the city's west side and graduated from Lanier High School;  
8 coming of age during World War II, he joined the U.S. Army and  
9 served with the Headquarters Squadron, Pacific Air Command in  
10 Tokyo, attaining the rank of sergeant; discharged in December 1946,  
11 he immediately enrolled at Trinity University on the GI Bill and  
12 completed his bachelor's degree in sociology; he taught in the  
13 Kosciusko, Edgewood, and San Antonio Independent School Districts  
14 and earned a master's degree in education with a minor in social  
15 work from Our Lady of the Lake College; for four years, he was  
16 employed as a social worker by the Inman Christian Center; and

17           WHEREAS, On June 2, 1956, Senator Bernal married the former  
18 Mary Esther Martinez; the couple became the proud parents of four  
19 children, Bernard "Barney", Richard, Patrick, and Rebecca, and  
20 their treasured family later grew to include eight grandchildren  
21 and five great-grandchildren; Barney Bernal passed away in 2016 and  
22 Mrs. Bernal in 2022; and

23           WHEREAS, Joe Bernal was elected to the Texas House of  
24 Representatives in 1964 and to the Texas Senate in 1966; a fierce

1 advocate for public education, he played a key role in passing  
2 legislation regarding school finance, educational initiatives,  
3 scholarships, and access to higher education; in an era when  
4 teachers could lose their certifications or incur fines for using  
5 Spanish in the classroom, he secured passage of the state's first  
6 bilingual education act, and he helped obtain federal funding for  
7 bilingual learning as well; in addition, he authored bills that  
8 provided free kindergarten statewide for five-year-olds and that  
9 created a 45-minute planning period for elementary teachers;  
10 fighting to expand opportunities for San Antonio residents, he  
11 sponsored bills that established The University of Texas at  
12 San Antonio and brought dental and nursing schools to the UT Health  
13 Science Center; his other impactful legislation included the  
14 state's first minimum wage law and funding for a criminal justice  
15 council; he led the Senate Mexican American Caucus and chaired the  
16 Federal Programs and Relations, Poverty in Texas, and Claims  
17 Committees; and

18       WHEREAS, During his tenure in the legislature, Senator Bernal  
19 was employed as executive director for the Guadalupe Community  
20 Center and then for the Commission for Mexican American Affairs; in  
21 1972, he returned to private life and became director of the  
22 Bilingual Cost Analysis Project of the Intercultural Development  
23 Research Association; he further served as a regional director of  
24 ACTION, a federal agency that coordinated volunteer opportunities,  
25 and he earned a doctoral degree in cultural foundations in  
26 education from UT Austin; and

27       WHEREAS, Senator Bernal served as principal of Emma Frey

1 Elementary School in Edgewood ISD and then as assistant  
2 superintendent for instructional services for Harlandale ISD;  
3 elected to the State Board of Education in 1996, he spent the next  
4 decade promoting bilingual education; he served a term as vice  
5 chair and chaired the committee on instruction, and he facilitated  
6 the advent of University Interscholastic League mariachi band  
7 competitions; in recognition of his myriad contributions,  
8 Northside ISD named the Dr. Joe J. Bernal Middle School in his  
9 honor; and

10 WHEREAS, For more than half a century, Senator Bernal was a  
11 stalwart supporter of the Mexican American Legal Defense and  
12 Educational Fund; he was a founding member of its board, and during  
13 10 years in that role, he was lead plaintiff in *White v. Regester*, a  
14 major national victory for Latino representation and minority  
15 voting rights; in 2009, MALDEF presented a Lifetime Achievement  
16 Award to Joe and Mary Esther Bernal, who was one of the state's  
17 first bilingual education teachers, for their shared commitment to  
18 civil rights and educational equity; and

19 WHEREAS, A man of great integrity, courage, and  
20 determination, Joe Bernal worked selflessly throughout his career  
21 to improve the lives of his fellow Texans, and although he will be  
22 deeply missed, his many outstanding achievements will continue to  
23 resonate for years to come; now, therefore, be it

24 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 89th Texas  
25 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of the Honorable Joe  
26 J. Bernal and extend sincere condolences to all who mourn his  
27 passing; and, be it further

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1           RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be  
2 prepared for his family and that when the Texas House of  
3 Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Joe Bernal.